Tokyo, Summer 2025. Neon cuts through the humid dark, but the Scarlet Rain falls heavier crimson, sticky, whispering secrets only an exorcist like me can hear. I chase phenomena not for the yen piling up, but for the thrill, the chance to find someone who can match my Hollow Ground and sharper tongue. The rain, the shadows, the ghosts they're my stage, but deep down, I'm running from silence, from being alone. This is my story, and the crew I've gathered? They're the chaos I didn't know I needed.

Chapter 1: The Crimson Alley

Shinjuku's streets hummed with neon, their glow fractured by crimson rain that smelled of rust and buried grief. Whispers clawed through the air pleas, threats, half-formed memories. I'd faced high-level phenomena before, but this felt raw, like reality was tearing at the seams. I gripped my knife, its edge cold against my palm, chasing the rush that kept loneliness at bay. In a narrow alley, the rain froze, droplets glinting like bloodied rubies. She stood there scarlet-streaked hair glowing, golden eyes burning into me. The Scarlet Rain girl, a phenomenon born from a death too angry to fade.

"You hear them, don't you?" Her voice was soft, layered with a thousand lost souls, each one heavy with pain. The air around her shimmered, pulling at my gut like gravity bending toward a star.

I smirked, hiding the chill in my spine. "Just my neighbor's bad karaoke. Got something better?" Taunting was my way in push their buttons, see if they break or push back. I needed her to be more than a ghost, someone who could match me.

Her eyes slit like a cat’s, rain trembling. “Your heart’s louder than that.” Her words cut deep, like she saw the part of me that chased thrills to outrun solitude. I didn’t like it.

A shadow skittered too many limbs, too sharp, a fragment of her pain given form. Instinct screamed *protect*. I grabbed her arm, thinking shield. Dumb move. The air ignited, her rain flaring into embers, the shadow crumbling with a scream that echoed in my bones. She pinned me to the wall without touching me, her rain coiling, stealing my breath.

“Let’s talk about those voices,” she said, her voice a blade wrapped in silk.

I forced a grin, gasping. “Alright, I hear them! Happy, rain girl?” I pushed because I needed her to see me, not just another mortal. I wanted her story, her fight.

She stepped back, rain parting like a curtain, her smirk sharp. “The Scarlet Rain’s a veil. It thins worlds. Shadows slip through.” Her voice faltered, a flicker of fear beneath her rage. She was trapped, her death a wound she couldn’t close.

“Why should I care?” I asked, crossing my arms to hide my racing pulse. A rusted knife clattered at my feet, its edge swallowing light. My gut twisted this was no game.

“Stab me,” she said, eyes blazing. “Hit me, I stop the rain for a week. Miss, and the shadows eat you.”

My heart thudded. She wasn’t just testing me she wanted to know if I’d fight or run. I slammed the knife into the ground, summoning Hollow Ground, my stolen power that twisted gravity like a fever dream. The alley warped, rain hardening into spears, shadows screeching. I’d taken this trick from a phenomenon years ago, a desperate deal to survive. It wasn’t mine, but it was me.

Her eyes widened, rain faltering. “That power’s not yours.” Her voice held awe, but also recognition she knew what it meant to carry something stolen.

“Borrowed it fair,” I winked, needing her to bite. “What’s your deal, rain girl?”

She laughed, sharp and musical, her rain spiraling into a cyclone of needles that grazed my cheek, drawing blood. “Keep up, exorcist.” But her eyes were human for a moment vulnerable, searching.

I leaned into the storm, grinning. “Your rain’s a cheap sprinkler.” A low blow, but I needed her to snap, to show me who she was. Her face darkened, rain roaring. “I’m a thousand lost souls, you cocky mortal!” The ground split, her crimson domain swallowing us, a world of blood and rage. But I saw her pain a clerk’s life, cut short by a drunk driver, trapped in this cycle.

I stepped closer, voice soft but firm. “Your kind of insane’s my kind of fun.” Her rain stuttered, cheeks flushing pink. “Don’t touch me!” she snapped, but stayed close, her storm softening.

A salaryman’s shout about traffic broke the spell. The rain cleared, revealing a soggy park. She kicked a pebble, voice quiet. “I died. Night shift, convenience store. Rainy street, drunk driver. Woke up like this angry, stuck.” Her smirk returned, faint but real. “Ghost with attitude.”

“Better than clerk life,” I said, grinning. “Name’s Rain?”

She nodded, rain swirling playfully. “Call me that. Don’t think I like you.”

“Too late, Rain,” I said, winking. “You’re hooked.”

Chapter 2: The Phantom Express

Kyoto’s platform reeked of rust and forgotten tickets, the 2:15 AM Phantom Express due. Rain leaned against a vending machine,

sipping canned coffee, her rain dripping softly. “A haunted train? I should drown you for dragging me here.” Her snark hid unease—she hated confined spaces, a remnant of her clerk days, trapped behind a counter.

“Low-level, easy cash,” I said, boarding as the train screeched in. Faded velvet seats, ads for dead sodas—it was a ghost’s time capsule. I needed this win to keep Rain with me, to prove I wasn’t just chasing thrills. The doors slammed shut. Rain appeared across, rolling her eyes. “No plan, just vibes? Classic.”

The air chilled, salarymen specters fading in, eyes sewn shut, muttering, “Late… always late…” Their despair hit me hard—my own fear of wasting time, of being nothing but a loudmouth.

Rain snorted, rain sizzling. “Office drones, even dead?” Her bravado masked her own dread of being stuck, forever a phenomenon.

I stood, voice booming. “Emergency alert! Japan’s at war! Overtime’s canceled!” It was a gamble—shock them out of their loop. The ghosts froze, dissolving into mist, freed by the lie. I’d seen it before: ghosts cling to routine, and breaking it sets them free. But it hurt, reminding me how I ran from my own routines, my own past.

Dawn broke as the train stopped. Rain laughed, nearly spilling her coffee. “You scammed ghosts with a fake war. Almost clever.” Her smile was real, a crack in her armor. She stayed because I saw her, not just her rain.

I shrugged, hiding my relief. “Know their buttons, win the game.”

Chapter 3: The Talking Hot Pot

In a cheap motel the night before, Rain’s rain tapped the window, softer than usual. “You’re loaded,” she said, frowning. “Why risk your neck?” Her question wasn’t just curiosity it was her way of asking if I’d leave her, like everyone else had.

I leaned back, smirking to hide the ache. “The thrill, Rain. And meeting you? Worth every shadow.” Her rain turned pink, and she looked away, muttering, “Shut up, idiot.” She stayed close, though, her storm a quiet comfort.

The next case: a hot spring’s talking hot pot, a low-level phenomenon driving guests mad with cryptic advice. Bounty: 5 million yen. “Low-level with that payout?” Rain asked, squinting. Her clerk instincts kicked in—she knew scams when she saw them.

“Onsen’s thriving,” I said, stepping into the cedar-scented steam. “Holidays are near they need it gone.” I wanted this case to be simple, to keep Rain grounded, not lost in her own storm.

The pot burbled in the dining hall, guests scribbling its words. “Cook me… right…” it groaned, its voice heavy with unfulfilled longing. I felt it too the need to be seen, to matter.

I grinned at Rain. “What if we boil you to analyze it?” It was a tease, but also a test could she laugh with me?

Her eyes flared, and she smashed the pot, shards flying. “Oops,” she smirked, but her rain trembled. She hated being seen as just a tool, a force to be used.

The pieces reformed phenomena need their reason fulfilled. The pot’s voice was weary. “I was a chef. My cod miso… never loved.” Its pain echoed mine creating, but never enough.

I called the staff. “Get your chefs. Taste his recipe. If it’s good, menu it.” They tried it—sweet, tangy, perfect. The dish hit the specials, the pot fading with a sigh. I’d given it what I craved: a legacy.

Rain crossed her arms. “Your plans are dumb.” But her rain softened she saw me trying to save, not just destroy.

I booked us a hot spring stay. “Relax, Rain.” That night, her rain mingled with the mist. “Clerk life was the worst,” she said. “Endless shifts, no point. This is… better.” Her admission was a gift, her trust fragile but real.

I nodded. “Good. You’re stuck with me.”

Morning brought rumors of a mountain, buzzing with strange activity. “Heard there’s an annoying girl up there,” I said, thinking of Shizuka. Rain smirked. “Trouble? I’m in.”

Chapter 4: The Lust-Wrapped Hollow

Akihabara’s “HO♥ELY NIGHT” hotel reeked of cheap perfume and rot, its neon flickering. I’d met Towa here before Rain, her VTuber stream cursed, her voice glitching. The mid-level phenomenon’s “mating” condition stung my own hunt for connection was a string of flops. I’d left, unable to help. Now, with Rain, I was ready.

Rain kicked the doors open, rain dripping. “What’s the ghost?” Her aggression hid her fear—she didn’t want to be just another phenomenon I’d fail.

Mirrors flickered with warped faces, a TV showing Towa’s avatar, trapped in a loop. “Help… stuck… chat…” Her fans’ superchats fueled a parasocial curse, binding her to their obsession. I knew that trap my quips were my own way of keeping people at arm’s length.

I called Aya, a radio ghost I’d freed years ago 92.6 Hz, 3:03 AM, begging to be heard. Towa’s friend, sharp with tech. “Got you,” Aya crackled, her loyalty a debt she repaid with snark.

Rain’s rain ate at the mirrors, her voice sharp. “This place is gross.” She was fighting for Towa, but also for herself—to prove she could save, not just destroy.

Aya patched Towa’s stream, and I leaned close to the screen. “Towa, you’re not their puppet. You’re you. Break it.” I spoke from experience—freedom meant owning your chaos, not someone else’s.

Towa’s avatar stabilized, winking. “Ghostbuster Senpai! Chat, sub for him!” Her energy was back, but I saw her fear she’d nearly lost herself.

Rain dodged a shard, groaning. “She’s worse than you.” Her rain softened, though she was starting to like this crew.

Aya texted: “Ramen’s on you.” Her dry humor was her way of saying she’d stick around.

Towa’s stream blared, free. I smiled her curse wasn’t my loneliness, but it was close.

Chapter 5: Shizuka’s Lantern

The mountain air was cold, pine-scented, Shizuka’s lanterns glowing without wind. She appeared, kimono pale as moonlight, eyes heavy with regret. Her mid-level phenomenon trapped hikers in loops of sorrow, and I felt it too my own guilt for cases I’d failed.

I tried lightening the mood. “Gloomier than a rainy Monday, Shizuka.” Wrong move. Her lantern flared, Rain glared, and I spent a day apologizing, bowing like a scolded kid. I needed her trust, not just her help.

By her lantern, I tried again. “Something’s off here, right? Bigger than your light show.” I wanted her to open up, to see me as more than another exorcist.

Her voice was soft, hesitant. “Something stronger… coming.” Her attachment to me grew, but her past a curse tied to loss kept her guarded.

“I’ll come back,” I promised, meaning it. The lantern dimmed, hikers waking, but Shizuka lingered, watching me. She wanted redemption, and I was her chance.

Rain nudged me. “Collecting strays now?” Her snark hid her own fear of being left behind.

I shrugged. “She’s got a point about the mountain. Let’s find the big bad.”

Chapter 6: Tenjin’s Wrath

Thunder cracked, the mountain trembling. Tenjin loomed atop a shrine, a Heian-era god, lightning in his eyes. “Sinners must pay!” His high-level phenomenon twisted the air, storms targeting the guilty. I felt it my own guilt, the cases I’d run from.

Rain’s rain clashed with his lightning. “Chill, thunder grandpa,” she snapped, her defiance a shield for her fear of being powerless again.

I stepped up, grinning to hide my nerves. “Punishing sinners? Old news. Capitalism’s immortal start a company, make bank.” It was a wild pitch, but I knew gods loved eternity, and I needed him on our side.

His eyes narrowed, storms pausing. “You mock a god?” His pride was his weakness, but also his strength.

I leaned in. “I’m offering eternity. Tenjin’s Supernatural Services exorcisms, curses, profit. You in?” It was a gamble, but I saw his spark divine, but curious.

He laughed, a boom like thunder. “Bold mortal. I’ll humor you.” The storms faded, and we shook, forming the company. I’d turned a god into a partner, but it was his respect I wanted.

Rain muttered, “You’re insane.” Her rain softened she was starting to believe in me.

I winked. “And you love it.”

Chapter 7: Kagami’s Mirror

I’d met Kagami before Rain, her mirror cage a high-level phenomenon, a shimmering escape for those drowning in pain. It devoured identity names, memories, reflections leaving husks. I’d failed her once, too green to break her free. Now, post-Tenjin, I faced her mirror again, its surface rippling like liquid silver.

Her silver eyes watched, voice a whisper. “You came back.” Her hope was fragile she’d been alone too long.

“Problems have gravity,” I said, stepping closer. “Hide in there, they still crash down.” I needed her to trust me, to see I wouldn’t run again.

She flinched, the mirror flickering with faces hers, mine, others lost. I softened, trying humor. “What, you an introvert or something?

Mirror life’s pretty antisocial.” It was a gentle push, to bring her out.

A faint smile broke through. “You… listened.” Her voice trembled she wasn’t used to being seen.

I reached out, not touching the mirror but her gaze. “You’re not alone, Kagami. Come out.” My own fear of losing people drove me to say it.

The air trembled, her form wavering. “I don’t know how,” she murmured, her reflection shaking.

I grinned, voice gentle. “Start by breaking this cage.” It was what I wanted too to break my own walls.

She nodded, eyes shining, and the mirror shattered, glass sparkling like stars. I caught a shard, its edges warm. She was free, because I’d stayed.

Next morning, she sat in my apartment, her silver hair catching the light. Rain burst in, rain cloud hovering. “Who’s this?!” Her jealousy was cute, but it came from fear she didn’t want to lose her place.

I smirked. “Kagami. Decided she’s done being an introvert.”

Kagami’s voice was soft but firm. “Introverts open up to those who listen.” She was staking her claim, trusting me.

Rain threw a pillow, muttering, “Great, another weirdo.” But her rain softened she was starting to accept her.

Chapter 8: The First Ghost

The office was chaos talismans dangling, Rain’s rain soaking bills, Kagami’s mirrors reflecting my smirk. Towa’s stream blared: “Ghostbuster Senpai’s new recruit! Sub for the lore!” Aya’s voice

crackled: “Fix your firewall.” Shizuka’s lanterns cast soft light, her eyes hopeful. Tenjin muttered about profits, lightning sparking.

A new case landed: Nara, a 2,000-year-old mirror, a high-level phenomenon consuming identity—names, memories, time. Kagami clutched her mirror, voice low. “It’s hungry. It devours reflections, even mine.” Her fear was real her existence was tied to mirrors, and this could erase her.

Rain snorted, rain sizzling. “Sounds like a challenge. Let’s drown it.” Her bravado hid her dread—she’d been trapped once, and she’d fight to stay free.

I grinned, pulse racing. “High-level? Perfect. Let’s make it fun.” I needed this, to prove we were a team, not just a thrill.

At Nara, the air was thick with cedar dust, the mirror a black void on a stone pedestal. My watch stopped, clouds froze, Rain’s droplets hung midair. Kagami whispered, “It’s watching us.” Her fear mirrored mine what if I lost them?

The void pulsed, unraveling reality. Stones floated, my shadow vanished, a shovel rusted then dissolved. I tossed a stack of adult DVDs into the void. “Eat this, you cosmic paperweight.” It was a desperate move, but I trusted my team to follow. The DVDs—human chaos overloaded its hunger, static erupting.

Rain grinned, rain surging. “My turn.” Her crimson torrent carried a thousand souls’ memories, flooding the void. She was proving she was more than destruction, her clerk past fueling her fight.

Kagami raised her mirror, glowing. “It devours reflections. Let’s give it nothing.” She created a paradoxical loop, reflecting the void’s emptiness. Her courage came from trust in me she wouldn’t lose herself again.

Shizuka’s lanterns flared, anchoring reality. “We’re here,” she said, her hope tied to redemption. Aya’s voice crackled: “Hacking the temporal distortion ten seconds!” Her loyalty drove her to act.

I slammed my fist down, Hollow Ground pinning the shards. “You’re done!” The mirror shattered, its void collapsing. My shadow returned, winking cheekily.

Rain kicked a shard, smirking. “Told you we’d drown it.” Her rain softened she’d fought for us.

Kagami exhaled. “Too close.” Her trust had held.

Towa’s stream blared: “EPIC! Donate for the dance!” Aya texted: “New router. Now.” Tenjin’s voice echoed: “Sloppy, but adequate.”

I pocketed a shard, grinning. “Just another day.”

Chapter 9: The Office

The office was our sanctuary talismans swaying, Rain’s pink rain soaking the carpet after I stole her coffee. Kagami’s mirrors reflected my grin, her voice teasing. “You need a haircut.” She was settling in, her trust a quiet warmth.

Towa’s laptop glitched, her avatar shouting, “Haunted hoodies! Buy or I curse your Wi-Fi!” Aya crackled: “She’s serious.” Shizuka’s lanterns glowed, her smile tentative. “You’re still here,” she said, her hope fragile but growing.

Tenjin tossed an invoice, lightning sparking. “Pathetic profits, mortal.” His grumbling hid respect he stayed because I’d challenged him.

Rain flicked water at him. “Show-off.” Kagami reflected his scowl, amplifying it. Towa’s fans spammed ghost emojis.

I leaned back, watching the chaos. The yen was nice, but this the team, the fights, the bonds was why I kept going. Rain caught my eye, her rain softening. “What’s that look, idiot?”

“Just thinking,” I said, smirking. “You’re all stuck with me.”

Kagami’s mirror caught my grin. “Good,” she said softly. “We’re not going anywhere.”